

Welcomes President Recognition of GI Bill Benefits

SCOTTSDALE - Reacting to President Obama's Oval Office address earlier tonight declaring an end to combat operations in Iraq, U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell said he wished the President would have spoken about the need to help our returning veterans who are at risk for suicide

"While I welcome the President's recognition of the GI Bill as an essential down payment on the debt we owe to our troops, the President could have addressed the growing suicide epidemic among our servicemen and women and returning heroes," said Mitchell. "Education is not the only thing we need to provide for our veterans as they adjust back to civilian life. Too many continue to struggle with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and are at risk for suicide. The Pentagon and the VA need to increase their outreach to these veterans."

Yesterday, Mitchell called on President Obama to address the needs of our troops and returning veterans and the struggles they face when they return home. [Source: [Mitchell Press Release](#) , August 30, 2010]

The Suicide Epidemic

Last month, Mitchell, who chairs the House Veterans Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, and has continued his call on the VA to explain why they stopped successful outreach efforts to veterans at risk for suicide, chaired a hearing examining on the subject. [Source: [Mitchell Release](#) , July 14, 2010]

As of April 2010, the VA has reported nearly 7,000 rescues of actively suicidal veterans, which were attributed to seeing the ads, PSAs, or promotional products. Additionally, referrals to VA mental health services increased. In Phoenix, the VA reported a 234 percent increase in calls to the suicide hotline within 30 days of the launch of its public awareness campaign. However, late last year, the VA told Mitchell that, despite the success, the PSAs had stopped airing. [Source: [Congressional Inquiry](#) , March 2010]

The suicide hotline is often the front line of the government's expanding efforts to deter suicide among veterans. [[New York Times](#) , July 30, 2010]

Last month, the Army released a 15-month-long study that reported that in Fiscal Year 2009, 239 soldiers committed suicide in both the active duty and reserve force. Additionally, 146 soldiers died due to "high risk" behavior, including 74 drug overdoses. During the same time frame there were 1,713 suicide attempts. [Source: [CNN](#) , July 29, 2010]

In June, the Army experienced a record high number of suicides. USA Today reported that "the suicide rate among 18-to29-year old men who've left the military has gone up significantly."

Specifically, according to The New York Times, veterans account for about one in five of the more than 30,000 suicides committed in the United States each year. [Source: [USA Today](#) , Jan. 11, 2010;

[New York Times](#)

, July 30, 2010]

Mitchell has repeatedly called upon the VA to increase outreach to veterans who need mental health services and are at risk of suicide. Out of an estimated veteran population of 23 million veterans, only about 8 million veterans are enrolled for care through the VA [Source: [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) , April 28, 2010]

GI Bill Benefits

Since August 2009, the VA has issued Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to almost 310, 000 student veterans. Approximately 1,100 students at Arizona State University are using the benefit, according to university officials.

Since the GI Bill bill was signed into law in 2008, Mitchell has fought to ensure that the new benefits are distributed as intended by Congress.

Just yesterday the VA finally complied with Mitchell's demand that it finally published eagerly awaited updates to tuition and fees reimbursement charts for hundreds of thousands of GI Bill beneficiaries, a month after the changes were due. [Source: [Mitchell Press Release](#) , August 31, 2010]

"Congressman Mitchell once again went to bat for student veterans everywhere by reminding the VA that not completing their GI Bill homework on time is unacceptable," said Patrick Campbell, Legislative Counsel for IAVA, which rates Mitchell among their top 13 most effective members of Congress on veterans issues. "I don't think it was a coincidence that a day after the VA received a letter from Congressman Mitchell that the VA finally posted the new GI Bill rates, exactly a month late."

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